

The Wisdom of being Religious.

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# SERMON

PREACH'D

Before His GRACE

*James* Duke of ORMOND,

Lord-Lieutenant General,

And General GOVERNOR

OF  
IRELAND,

AT THE

Castle-Chappelin *Dublin*;

*February* the 20th, 1703.

By EDWARD SYNGE, M. A.

*Rector* of Christ's-Church, Cork; *And One of His GRACES*  
*Chaplains.*

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## The Wisdom of Being Religious, &amp;c.

Job XXVIII. Vers. XXVIII.

*The fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom; And to depart from evil is Understanding,*

**H**OWEVER, Men may differ from each other in some of their particular Sentiments concerning *Wisdom*, and the way and Method of attaining unto it; Yet, as they all do Universally agree in the general Apprehensions that they have of it (as I shall soon have Occasion more fully to shew) so do they, no less Unanimously, acknowledge that it is a thing of the highest Value, and greatest Importance.

In the 12th Verse of this Chapter, Holy Job proposes to make a search after this Great and Inestimable Treasure; *Where (says he) shall Wisdom be found? And where is the place of Understanding?* And, after a short, but Elegant, descant upon this Subject, thro' the following Verses, partly to Extol and Recommend the great Excellencies of it; And partly to Tax the Errors and folly of Men, that have not sufficiently raised their Thoughts up to it; He, at last, concludes his Discourse upon this Point, in the Words of my Text; *Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom; And to depart from evil is Understanding.*

That these two Expressions, *The fear of the Lord*, And, *To depart from Evil*, are, both of them, put to denote one and the same thing, namely, *Religion*; And that these two Words, *Wisdom*, and *Understanding* (However, they may be nicely distinguished

med by a *Philosopher*; One of them seeming more directly to point at *Things Speculative*, and the other to *Matters of Practice* are, yet, here put altogether in the same Signification, and the later made only a Synonymous Term to the former; I take to be so very plain to every one that considers the *Poetical* Style and manner of Expression of this Book, that I will not spend time in Explaining or Proving it: But, supposing the Text to be easy enough to be understood, shall only resolve the full Sense and Import of it into this one short Proposition; Namely, that Religion is the best and Truest Wisdom.

In Discoursing upon this Proposition, I shall observe the following Method.

*First*, I shall, very briefly, shew what are the *general Notions*, that *all Mankind* have, concerning *Wisdom*, and the Parts or Properties of it.

*Secondly*, I shall, with what exactness I can, apply these same *general*, and uncontested, *Notions* unto *Religion*, in particular, and thereby endeavour both to prove and illustrate that Great Truth, which I have laid down from the Text; namely, that *Religion is the best and truest Wisdom*.

Upon the former of these two Heads, I shall not have Occasion long to Dwell; Because, I design under it to offer nothing, but what is already Assented to by all Men; And therefore will not stand in need of any Proof. To begin therefore,

In the first Place; When any Evil comes upon a Man, which he is no way able to prevent, or get himself freed from; It is but a *foolish* thing for him to fret and vex, and grow Impatient under the Affliction: For this is the way only, to render that Yoke more galling and uneasy, which (as we now suppose) He is not able either to break or shake off: And, on the other side; When a *Wise Man* is Afflicted, and can find no other Remedy for it, at least he will do his utmost to bear it patiently; This being the only way that is left him, either to make the Evil something more Tolerable, or to put himself into a better posture to bear it, and thereby to lessen or Alleviate





Alleviate his Misery. I lay down this therefore, as the First part of property of true *Wisdom*; Namely, Always to bear those Evils patiently which we cannot avoid.

In the Second Place; When a Man Fore-sees any Evil that Threatens him; And has it in his Power to avoid it: If he through his own negligence, suffers a Calamity to overtake him, which, by a timely Precaution, he might have Repelled, or otherwise Diverted; He is justly to be Taxed with want of Prudence. But a *Wise Man* not only Fore-seeth the Evil, but also either hinders himself, or useth some other means, If it be possible, to escape it. And moreover; If several Evils do, at one time, hang over him, all which he cannot possibly avoid, he will always be sure to make choice of the least, and to shun that which is the greatest. I lay down this therefore, as the Second part or property of true *Wisdom*, viz. To avoid all such Evils as are avoidable; and, more especially, the greatest Evils. Prov. 12. 11

In the Third Place; When any thing that is really Good is proposed to a Man, together with a certain, or but Probable, way of Obtaining it; If he either flights the good thing that is so Proposed; or is Cold and Slack in his Endeavours after it; he deservedly incurs the censure of Folly. For as a *Wise Man* is ever careful to avoid Evil; so is he no less Industrious in the Prosecution of whatever is truly good. And, farthermore, If several good things at once are offered to his View, and he finds himself not able to compass them all; he always prefers the greater Good before that which is less, and pursues it accordingly. I lay it down therefore as the Third part or property of true *Wisdom*; To seek after every thing that is really good; and always to prefer the greater good before the less.

In the Fourth Place; Where several Ways or Methods do, all of them, seem to tend to One and the same End; If One of these Ways be sure and Certain, and the others liable to Difficulty and Uncertainty; A wise man, if he Proposes the End to himself, will undoubtedly make choice of the most Certain Method that Occurs.

curs, in Order to the Obtaining of it : Nor will any, but a very indiscreet Man, forsake a Road that he cannot miss, in Exchange for another which, he has reason to fear, may never bring him to the Place he Designs to go to. This therefore I Offer as the Fourth Part or property of *True Wisdom*, That is to say, *Always to Proceed upon sure and certain Grounds* ; I mean, *where such Grounds are to be had*.

In the Fifth and last Place ; When, at any time, a Case Appears to be Doubtful or Difficult ; And no *Certain* Way can be found, whereby a Man may be *Sure* to Gain and Compass the end that he Proposes to himself : A wise Man, yet, even in these Circumstances of things, will not *Hastily* or *Blindly* Determine himself or his Actions ; Neither will it presently be Indifferent to him which way he chooses, although he cannot pretend with perfect Assurance to fore-tell what the Event or Consequence of any of those that are Proposed shall be. But if he be truly a *Wise Man*, he will First consider the Reasons that Offer themselves on the several sides ; and that with such Care and Accuracy as may be suitable to the Importance of the thing in Debate ; And when he has done thus ; If no such thing as *Absolute Certainty* can be found for him to Proceed upon ; He will then make Choice of that Way which, after Mature Deliberation, appears to be the *most Probable*, in Order to the Obtaining of his End, and also where he can Promise to himself the Greatest *Security*. This then I reckon as the last part or property of *True wisdom* ; Namely, *In all doubtful cases, to make Choice of that Way which Appears to have in it, both the Greatest Probability and the Greatest Safety*.

And thus I have done with the First thing Proposed, which was to give some Account of the General Notions that all Men have of *Wisdom*, and its Parts or Properties : Give me leave just to name the particulars once again, because it will be Necessary that we carry them in Memory along with us, in Order to a clearer and more lively Apprehension of what is to be said upon the other Head of my Discourse that comes next to be taken into Consideration.

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The Parts or Properties then of *True wisdom* I have shewn, according to the Judgment of all Men, to be these: viz. First, to bear those Evils Patiently which we cannot avoid: Secondly, to avoid all such Evils as are avoidable, and more Especially the Greatest Evils: Thirdly, to seek after every thing that is really Good, and always to Prefer the greater Good before the less: Fourthly, always to Proceed upon Sure and Certain Grounds, where such Grounds are to be had: And Fifthly, In all doubtful Cases, to make Choice of that Way which Appears to have in it both the greatest Probability, and the greatest Safety. He that constantly and steadily is Guided by these Principles in all his Actions, I think very justly deserves the Name of a *Wise Man* Nor: do I see how it is possible to add any thing to his Character. I proceed therefore to the

Second thing proposed; Which was to Apply these General Notions concerning *Wisdom*, to *Religion* in Particular; And that in Order to Prove the Truth which is Contained in my Text, viz. That *Religion is the best and Truest Wisdom*.

If then it can clearly be shewn Concerning *Religion*; First, That by it alone we are Enabled to bear those Evils Patiently which we cannot avoid: Secondly, That by it we avoid the most and greatest Evils: Thirdly, That by it we Obtain the most and greatest Goods: Fourthly, That it Relies upon Sure and Certain Grounds: And Fifthly, That, Supposing it were as Doubtful and Uncertain as some do pretend that it is, yet still it would Appear to be both the most Probable way for the Obtaining of that End which every Man proposes to himself, and also by much the Safest and Securest way: If all these Five things, I say, can clearly be Proved Concerning *Religion*, it must necessarily follow, from what has been already said, that *It is*, beyond all Dispute, *The best and the Truest Wisdom*.

First, Then I am to prove, that by *Religion* alone we are enabled patiently to bear those Evils which we cannot avoid.

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As we are, all of us, subject to many great Evils, as long as we remain in this Vale of Misery, such as *Pain, Sickness, Poverty, Disgrace*, and the like : So is it Evident, to every Man's Experience or Observation, that these same Evils do or may attack us, sometimes so *suddenly*, as not to be foreseen, and sometimes so *violently*, as not possibly to be avoided by us. Now when any sort of Affliction falls thus *heavily* upon a *Vicked Man*, who has no Devout or Just Apprehension of God and Religion, he presently feels the smart thereof, with a quick and tender Sense, but finds nothing in it, from whence he may draw some ease, or derive Comfort to himself. The longer therefore he lyes and Labours under such a Pressure, the more heavy and Grievous the Burthen must needs grow to him; And his *Misery* and *Impatience* cannot but Daily Increase together. But, on the other side, when a *Pious and Good Man* falls under any Calamity, how great soever, He presently has Recourse to Religion as to a Sanctuary, where he never fails to find such Substantial relief as, not only mitigates, but, in a manner, wholly *Asswages* and takes away the Anguish. He considers that God Governs and Conducts the Affairs of this World, not only with a *General*, but also a most *particular Providence* : He calls to Mind that, altho' *Two Sparrows were Sold for a Farthing*; yet *one of them does not fall on the Ground without his Heavenly Father*; And therefore, what ever befalls him, he always *Receives*, and looks upon it as coming from the Hand of God. He also Remembers, that God is a kind and Merciful Father; And *Chastises His Children*, because He loves them. And because it is for their Good; Being designed to yield the *peaceable Fruit of Righteousness unto them*, which are *Exercised thereby*. That All things work together for good to them that love God; And if he bears the Hand of the Lord with true Repentance and a perfect Resignation of himself to his Holy Will and Pleasure; This *light Affliction* which is but for a moment, will work for him a far more exceeding and

*Eternal*

Mat. 10. 29.

Heb. 12. 6.

Yerl. 17.

Rom. 8. 28.

1 Cor. 4. 17.



*Eternal weight of Glory.* Upon these Considerations therefore, the Pious Man, being Assisted also by the Grace of God, is not only patient; but sometimes also, even Rejoyces, and Glories in Tribulations; knowing that Tribulation worketh Patience, and Patience Experience, and Experience Hope which maketh not ashamed. And thus it sufficiently, I think appears, that Religion is the only Thing that can Enable us to bear those Evils patiently, which we cannot avoid; Which was the First thing to be proved under this

The Second Thing to be shewn, is, that, by Religion we avoid the most and greatest Evils: And the Third Thing is, that, by it we obtain the most and greatest Goods. These two I choose to put together, because the very same Arguments do prove them both, the one being little more than a Consequence from the other. Now the greatest Evils that befall us, with Respect to this World, (And under which all particular ones seem to be Comprehended) are Pain and Sickness, which Affects our Bodies; Want and Poverty, which refers to our Estates, and Shame and Disgrace, which has Relation to our Reputation and good Name: And, on the contrary, the greatest Worldly good Things, in Opposition to these Evils, are A vigorous and healthy Constitution of Body; A competent Fortune to maintain us in the World, and a fair Character among those who know, or hear of, Us: Nor is there any better or surer way for a Man to avoid all these Evils, and secure to himself each and every of these Goods, than by being Religious. For Religion makes a Man Sober, Chast, and Temperate, which is the best way to preserve his Health and Strength: Religion makes him Honest, Industrious, and Frugal; And that is the surest Method of getting a Competency to live upon: And, lastly, Religion makes him Just and True, Peaceable and Charitable in all his Actions and Dealings; The Natural Consequence,

quence, of which is the Love and good Will of all that know him, and a *good Character* from all that have Occasion to name him. And thus it appears, that by *Religion* we are most likely to avoid the *greatest Evils*, and secure to ourselves the Chief and most Comprehensive *good Things*, even of *this VWorld*.

But there are greater *Evils* to be feared and avoided, and greater *Goods* to be desired and sought after by us, than any of these which I have already mentioned; I mean such *Goods* and *Evils* as are *Spiritual*; and have Relation altogether to the *VWorld to come*; The principal of which are, On the one hand, a *disturbed Conscience*, and *Eternal Damnation*; and on the other, a *quiet and peaceable Conscience*, and *everlasting Salvation*: Which *Evils* also, are no other way to be avoided, nor *Goods*, any other way to be Obtained or secured, but by *Religion*. Give me leave to speak a little more largely upon this Point, because it is a Matter of the greatest concern to us.

How great a Misery it is to labour under the Terrours of an *Unquiet Conscience*, is abundantly acknowledged by those Unhappy Persons who have felt its Torments (And Consequently are best able to give an Account of it) who have, many of them, declared, that the greatest Sufferings, that the *Body* is Capable of undergoing, are not to be Compared to the Lashes and Convulsions wherewith their *Mind* has been Rack't and Tortur'd. *Solomon*, the Wisest Man, of a meer Man, that ever was, Expresses this in a very Emphatical manner: *The Spirit of a Man* (says he) *will sustain his Infirmities*; But a *wounded Spirit who can bear?* Prov. 18. 14.

*The Spirit of a Man*, that is his Courage and Resolution, *will sustain his Infirmities*, that is, will bear up against whatsoever may befall his *Body*, which by nature is Frail and Infirm: But a *wounded Spirit*, that is, a Disturbed and Afflicted Conscience, *who can bear?* What Strength what Courage can be sufficient



sufficient to support a Man under such a Pressure? And indeed if we do but Consider the thing *in it self*, it cannot but be very Dreadful for a Man to lye under a quick and Sensible Apprehension of the just and deserved Wrath and Displeasure of the great God of Heaven and Earth, whose Judgments, he has reason to fear, may fall upon him in this Life; But will, If not prevented by a through Repentance, most certainly overwhelm him with Woe and Anguish to all Eternity in the Life to come. And if the bare Apprehension of the Wrath of God and *Eternal Damnation* be thus Amazing and Terrible, even before a Man has any otherwise felt them, What shall we think of the Condition of those Miserable Wretches, who, by the Just Judgment of God, are for ever Condemned to that Place of Torments, *where their Worm Dieth*

*not, and the Fire is not Quenched?* But then, On the Mar. 9. 44. other hand, what an Inexpressible satisfaction must it be for a Man not only to be free from the Terrour and Affliction of an unquiet Conscience, but also to feel a *Spring* of Joy, rising up in his mind, from a just Apprehension of his being at Peace with God and in his favour here, and a well Grounded hope of being Eternally happy with him hereafter? And yet even this its self is but small, if Compared to that Psal. 16. 11. *Fulness of Joy which is in the Presence of God*, and those *Pleasures which are for evermore at his Right Hand*; and which are to be the Portion of the Blessed to all Eternity. I need not, I think, say any more to Convince you that these *Spiritual Evils and Goods*, upon which I have been insisting, are the *Greatest* that Man is Capable of Suffering on the One side, or Enjoying on the other.

Now it is possible indeed, that a *Wicked Man* may, for a little time, by some Artifices elude his Conscience, and Remain Insensible of the Stings or Cries of it: He may Drown it with Drink, and the noise of Extravagant Mirth; or Divert it with

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much Business or many sorts of Recreation; and so perhaps may *Think* that he has charmed it and laid it to Sleep forever. But alas! What signifies all this? *Conscience*, the more and the longer it is thus forcibly Restrained, the more Violently will it, One Day, like a Spring, return upon him: And tho' we should suppose that at all other times he might be able to avoid its Importunity; Yet when he comes to lye upon a *Sick Bed*, and to be in Immediate Apprehension and Danger of *Death*, He shall find himself, like a Malefactor tyed to a Stake; Continually exposed to its Lashes and Insults. Then will his Sins come Crowding into his Remembrance with all their Horrid and Aggravating Circumstances; Then shall he feel what a Terrible thing it is to lye under the Apprehension of God's Wrath; And then, If never before, shall he find the comparison which the Prophet makes to be true, That *the Wicked are like the Troubled Sea, when it cannot rest, whose Waters cast up Mire and Dirt: For there is no Peace saith my God to the wicked;* This is plainly the Case of a Wicked Man with Respect to his *Conscience here*: And then, for his *Eternal Portion hereafter*; Truth its self has assured us, that as *the Righteous shall go into Life Eternal*, so shall the Wicked into Everlasting Punishment. Isaiah, 57. 20.  
21.  
Mat. 29. 41.

And as the *Ungodly Man*, whilst he continues such, has no possible way to secure himself from the Torments of a disturbed *Conscience here*, or escape those which by the Justice of God are prepared for him *hereafter*; So, on the other side, the *Righteous and Good Man* is altogether free and safe from each and both of these Dreadful and Amazing *Evils*, For when he seriously Considers both his past and Present Life (A thing which he often does) His own Heart (which is beyond a Thousand Witnesses) assures him that he has sincerely Repented of whatsoever he has done amiss, that he has heartily Endeavoured to Mortify and Subdue all his Lusts and Wicked



Wicked Inclinations; that he is not only *Ready*, but even *glad* of an *Opportunity* to do any thing that may be pleasing and acceptable to his Heavenly Father, that if, through Human Frailty, he is, at any time, surprised into a Sin, tho' never so small, he *Immediately* humbles himself before God and Begs his Pardon for it, with a full Resolution of being more Careful and Watchful against the like for the time to come; And lastly, that he is *steadfastly* and fully Resolved (Through God's Grace and Assistance) Always to continue in this good Disposition and Course of Life to the End of his Days. All this I say, a Religious and good Mans heart tells him, and Assures him of, as soon as he looks into it: And therefore, knowing God to be most Gracious and Merciful, and ready to Pardon and Receive all those who thus sincerely Repent and turn unto him, He finds no longer reason to Dread or Apprehend his Wrath: But having within himself the clear *Testimony of his Conscience, that in Simplicity and Godly sincerity, not with Fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God,* <sup>2 Cor. 1. 12.</sup> he has now for a long time had his *Conversation in the World*; He finds such Joy and Comfort in his mind, as is not to be Express'd, nor even Imagined, by any but him that feels it. And then, as to the Life to come, I need say no more, but that we have the Word of our Blessed Saviour himself, that all such as come up to this Character shall Receive that happy Sentence, at the last Day, *Come ye Blessed of my Father, Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the Foundation of the World*; And, in pursuance of the same, shall go away into *Life Eternal*. And thus <sup>Matthew, 25. 34.</sup> I hope I have sufficiently made good both the Second and Third thing Proposed, which were, That *by Religion we avoid the most and greatest Evils, and that by it we obtain the most and greatest Goods*; Which I have Endeavour'd fully to Prove with Relation to the Good and Evil things both

both of *this World* and of *that which is to come*. I pass on therefore to the

*Fourth* thing proposed to be shewn concerning *Religion*, which is that it *relies upon sure and certain Grounds*.

The *Grounds* upon which *Religion* stands, are two; *First Reason*, and Secondly, *Divine Revelation*.

*First* then, That *Reason*, where it is very *plain* and *clear*, is a *sure* and sufficient *Ground* for any Man to proceed upon, is readily acknowledged by all, except a few trifling *Scepticks*, who do not deserve to be reasoned with; nor does any one (even of the *Scepticks* themselves) refuse or scruple to put his *Liberty*, *Property*, or *Life*, or any thing, however near or dear unto him, upon any bottom, where he has *Evident* and *Convincing Reason* for his *Security*. Now, There is a very great part of *Religion* which is built upon such bright and solid *Reasons*, as is not to be gain-said by any one that seriously considers it. *Reason* not only *proves*, but even *Demonstrates* the *Being* and *Eternity* of *God*, Not only from the absolute *Impossibility* of an everlasting *Succession*, without beginning, of mutable and *Transient Beings*; But also from that great *Beauty*, *Order*, *Variety*, *Regularity*, *Harmony*, and *Usefulness*, which appear, even to our *Senses*, in all and every part of the visible *World*. *Reason* clearly shews the *Power*, *Wisdom*, and *Goodness* of *God*, from the works of the *Creation*; and our *Obligation* to *Worship*, *Obey*, and *Serve* him, from the continual dependance that we have upon him, in *Respect* both of our *Being* and *Preservation*: And *Lastly*, *Reason* abundantly convinces us, that it is our *Duty* to be *Pious*, *Devout*, *Sober*, *Just*, *True*, *Temperate*, and *Chast* (together with all or most of the great *Duties* of *Morality*) Because it assures us, that this is the *Will* of *God*, our *Lord* and *Creator*, and altogether agreeable to that *End* for which he made us: In a *Word*, All those *Doctrines* and *Rules* of *Life*, which go

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to make up what we commonly call *Natural Religion*, are with so much Evidence Establish'd upon, and proved by, the plain Principles of *Reason* alone, that, if we were destitute of all other Proof of these Matters, yet no sober and thinking Man could have any Just cause to Complain, that he wanted a full and sufficient Conviction as to any of them : And thus I think it appears, that *Religion*, As to a very great and Fundamental part of it, *relies upon a very sure and certain Ground*, namely, most clear and evident *Reason*.

But, *Secondly*, There is another *Ground* upon which *Religion* is built; And that is *Divine Revelation*, which not only *Explains* and *Incubates* the same things which *Reason*, to some perhaps, may seem but *Obscurely* to teach, and *feebly* to press: But also, *farther Improves* even the Dictates of *Reason*, and adds some things to *Religion*, and makes them parts of it, to the Knowledge of which no humane understanding, without such supernatural Assistance, could ever Arrive Now; that such *Revelation* is a solid and sufficient *Ground* to be *relyed upon*, must needs be acknowledged by all Men who own the Being of a Deity : Because as it is Impossible for God to be deceived; so is it altogether Incredible that He should impose a lye or falshood upon us. If then it can be fully proved, that there is such a *Revelation of Religion*, No more, I think, needs farther to be said to make out the undoubted *Certainty* of it. And that this *Revelation* is a real and well Established Truth, and no fiction or humane contrivance, will be easy to make appear, by considering a little, the *Prophecies* Recorded in the *Old Testament*, and fulfilled in the Person of *JESUS CHRIST*; The *Miracles* wrought by our Saviour and his Disciples for the Proof and Confirmation of the Gospel; And, Last-

One Man indeed there was who Taught, in Print, that *Divine Revelation* was only a Means of Information, and not, alone, a sufficient Ground of Persuasion: But I understand, that he has retracted this Wild and Absurd Doctrine.

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Iy, the great *Sufferings* which they underwent for the sake of those things, which they Taught and Testified.

That a very Extraordinary Person shou'd, one Day, be sent into the World to be a Teacher and a Saviour to Mankind; That he was to be *the Seed of the Woman, born of a Virgin*, of the Progeny of *Abraham*, and Lineage of *David*; To come into the World a little before the *Sceptre* should depart from Judah, and a *Law-giver* from *between his Feet*; To appear at a certain and determined time, foretold by the Prophet *Daniel*; To be Born in the Town of *Bethlehem*, To be *despised and rejected of Men*, a *Man of Sorrows and acquainted with Grief*, *Wounded for our Transgressions*, and having *the Iniquity of us all laid upon him*. And, Lastly, to be cut off, but not for himself, or for any Sin or Fault of his own: All this, I say, and more, was plainly foretold, in the *Old Testament*, many Hundreds of Years before *JESUS CHRIST* appeared in the World; and as evidently fulfilled in his Person, when he did appear. And since it is impossible for any but God to foretel so many things, and with such Particularity, so long before they come to pass; It must needs follow, that the Person, in whom all these remarkable Prophecies (and more) were so Exactly fulfilled, was most certainly sent into the World by Gods particular Appointment, and as his Messenger to Mankind; And consequently, that the Doctrine and *Religion*, which was Taught by him, or by his Direction, must be looked upon as coming from God, and *Revealed by Him*.

Again, That many *Miracles* and wonderful Works, beyond the course of *Nature*, and Power of *Art*, were wrought by Our Blessed Saviour; That, without the use of any natural Means, and only with a Touch, or a Word speaking, he Cured



red the most Inveterate, and otherwise incurable Diseases, give Sight to the Blind, hearing to the Deaf, speech to the Dumb, strength and soundness to the Lame and Maimed; and even Life it self to those that were Dead; That after he was Crucified, had a Spear thrust into his very Vitals, was Dead and Buried, He upon the Third Day arose again from the Dead; and, after many days conversing with his Apostles and Disciples, was at last in their sight openly taken up into Heaven; All this I say, being matter of fact, is so fully Testified by witnesses, whose Credit, As we shall presently see, is not to be doubted; that no Reasonable Man ought in the least to suspect the Truth of it: And the like Evidence also we have that many such like wonderful Works were performed by his Disciples, in his Name, after he himself was Departed out of this World. Now since it was plainly Impossible for any One to do such things as these without an *Extraordinary Power* derived from God (Nor is it to be Imagined, that God would Communicate such a *Power* to any One for the Confirmation of a *Lye*) It must follow, that those Doctrines, and that *Religion*, which were taught by our Saviour Christ and his Disciples, and thus *Confirmed* by them, were fully *Approved of and Ratified*, by God, and therefore are to be *Received and Embraced* as being of *Divine Original*.

In the last Place, And to conclude this point, It cannot be denied, but that our Blessed Saviour laid down his Life and freely under-went those bitter Sufferings, not only for the Universal Redemption of Mankind, which was his chief design, but also as an Evidence of his own Truth and Sincerity, with relation to those things that he Taught and Preached: And that his Apostles and Disciples undauntedly exposed themselves to all sorts of Persecutions, and even to *Death* it self; and

Mat. 11.  
Mar. 5. 26.

Joh. 19. 34.  
C. 20. 1. 67.

Act. 1. 9. 18.

Act. 2. 43.  
and 5. 12.

that accompanied with the most Terrible and Exquisite *Torments*, And all this for the sake of those things which they Taught and Testified concerning our Saviour *Jesus*, his Doctrines, and Miracles, and Particularly his *Resurrection* from the Dead, is a thing so notorious, as never yet to be Denied or Gain-said, even by the greatest Enemies of Christianity. Now, that the Doctrine and Religion of Christ is sufficiently upheld by the *Miracles* wrought by him and his Disciples (supposing that the truth of them can be fully Proved) I have already shewn: And if any Man shall deny that ever such *Miracles* were really wrought, I shall only desire him to answer me this One Question; namely, How it was possible for so many Men, as gave Testimony to these *Miracles*, to combine together to undergo all manner of Extremities, even unto death and Torments, only to Impose the belief of a false story upon the World, without any Prospect of advantage to themselves? Indeed it is most *Ridiculous* to Imagine, that ever there could be such a Combination, or that, if there were, the World could thus so generally have been Imposed upon: And therefore I conclude that the Death and Sufferings both of our Saviour and his Disciples, are an undeniable Evidence of the truth of their Testimony with Relation to the *Miracles* that are above-mentioned to have been wrought by them; and by Consequence therefore of the *Certainty* and *Divinity* of that Religion which they Taught and Preached. And thus it is, I think, sufficiently Proved, that Religion is built upon sure and certain Grounds; That is to say, partly, upon *Clear and Evident Reason*; And more fully upon *Divine Revelation*: The unquestionable truth of which is Established, by Prophecies, by Miracles, and Lastly, by the Death and Sufferings of *Jesus Christ* and his Disciples: And this might justly suffice for the Fourth thing to be shewn.

But



But here the half thinking *Sceptick* cries out, that he never saw *God* nor any of these *Miracles*; Neither was he present at the Accomplishment of any of these *Prophecies*; And therefore, why should he assent to these things (However plausibly they may be contrived) or give himself up to be guided by them? But *Vain Man*! Why do'st thou thus Trifle with *God* and thy own *Soul*? Didst thou ever see *Julius*, or *Augustus Caesar*, or *Henry the Seventh*, or the *Eighth Kings of England*? Or wast thou ever at *Rome* or *Constantinople*? and yet do'st thou not *Firmly Believe* that there were such *Persons*, and are, at this time, such *Places*? A Man born altogether *Blind* never did or could See either *Light* or *Colours*; And yet is it not Reasonable that he should give Credit to the Testimony of all his Neighbours who assure him that there are such things? If then (in like manner) the *Being of God*, and the truth of those *Prophecies* and *Miracles*, by which *Religion* is supported, be abundantly made out by such Arguments as are suitable to the Nature of the things to be Proved, and Circumstances of the Persons to whom such Proof is to be made; What folly is it for a Man to Refuse to yield to such Arguments, only, because he has not a *Sight* or sensible knowledge of such things, as either for their Nature or Distance, are not Capable of affording it to him?

But, In order to convince even the *Sceptick* himself, of the *Wisdom of being Religious*, I shall undertake to Argue this Point with him, even upon his own Principles. He does not (nor can any Man) pretend to bring *positive Arguments* to prove that *Religion is false*, that there is no *God*; and that all that is said concerning the *Miracles* and *Prophecies* upon which *Christianity* is Established, is no more but a *Fable*, and the meer fruit of Invention: But the utmost that his Objections will fairly amount to is, no more but this, that the Arguments brought for the truth of *Religion*, do not seem to him suffi-

ently to evince the things they are Alledged to prove : And that therefore, tho' he cannot positively shew that *Religion* is false; yet still to him it appears to be, at best, but *uncertain*, and therefore he cannot venture to build or rely upon it. This I say, is the very utmost force of the *Scepticks* Objection; And supposing, tho' by no means Granting, that all he says were true; yet still it wou'd be his *wisest* Course, to lead a *Religious* Life; because (as I am to shew)

*Fifthly, and Lastly, Supposing that Religion were as doubtful and uncertain as he pretends; yet still it is both the most probable way for the obtaining of that End, which every Man proposes to himself, and also the safest and securest way that he can take.*

*First, then I am to shew that Religion (supposing it were uncertain) is yet the most probable way for the obtaining of that End, which every Man proposes to himself.*

The *End*, that every Man does and must propose to himself, is to be *for ever happy*, I mean always upon a supposition that the thing is possible : And, if the question were put to each Man living, what it is that he most desires? It would be impossible, I think, for any of them, who should consider the matter, to give any other Answer but this; namely, that he desires to be truly *Happy*; and so to remain, If it may be, *to all Eternity*. Now if *Religion* will not bring us to *Eternal Happiness*, it is allowed by all, that there is no other way to it : And therefore if it be a *Probable Way*, at all, to such *Happiness*, it must needs be the *most probable way*, because there is no other way but its self to come in competition with it : And that it is, at least, a *probable Way* to this *Happiness*, is not to be denied (even by the *Sceptick* himself, if he has any reason) because the Arguments which prove the truth of it, and consequently of that *Eternal Happiness* that attends it, (However, they may be thought not *Certainly* and *Demonstratively* to conclude, yet) cannot be denied to be in themselves very likely and *probable*:

For



For who, otherwise, could Imagin that so many sober and considerate Men should in all Ages have been Convinced by them. *Religion* then, (altho' we should allow it not to be *Certain*) is yet the most *probable Way* to that End, that all Men propose to themselves, namely, *Eternal Happiness*. And as it is the *most probable*, so

Secondly, *It is the safest and securest Way*, that a Man can take.

That *Way*, which Exposés a Man to *no danger*, Let things fall out which way they will, is undoubtedly much *safer* than that which brings him into *the greatest Misery*; if Matters should appear to be otherwise than he, it may be, hoped or expected. Now, if *Religion* should at last prove to be no more but an empty Fiction, yet still a Man runs no *hazard* by living according to the Rules of it. For if he does not, after this Life, meet with that Reward, which it proposes and Promises to its Votaries, yet (besides the Satisfaction and quietness of Mind, which it affords him here) he still remains *safe* and *secure* from any Torment or Misery hereafter to be undergone or Endured. And if there should be no truth in *Religion*; The Righteous and the Wicked would, in that Respect, only be upon *equal Terms*, that is to say, both of them alike Translated to a State of insensibility, whensoever this Life should have an End. But, on the other side, If *Religion* at last shall prove to be a real and solid Truth, and no Fiction or Contrivance of Man (as some Men will one Day find to their Cost) Then he who has refused to be guided by it, and has chosen rather to follow his Lusts and corrupt Inclinations, shall find himself by his own folly unavoidably betrayed to the most intolerable Woe and Misery that can be Endured, or Imagined; And that, to last to all *Eternity*. If then *Religion* were a thing as *doubtful* and *uncertain* as the Sceptick most fallably pretends it is, yet still the bare *Probability* and *Safety* that

cannot

cannot be denied to be in it, were enough to make every wise Man Entertain and Embrace it.

And thus I have Endeavoured, as fully as the time would permit, to make good the Five Things which I Undertook, concerning Religion. I have shewn, *First*, That by it alone we are Enabled to bear those Evils patiently, which we cannot avoid : *Secondly*, That by it we avoid the most and greatest Evils : *Thirdly*, That by it we obtain the most and greatest Goods : *Fourthly*, That it relies upon sure and certain Grounds : And *Fifthly*, That Supposing it were doubtful and uncertain, yet still it would be the most probable way for the obtaining of that End, that all Men propose to themselves ; and also the safest Way, and most free from danger : All which put together do prove that great Truth which is contained in my Text, beyond all manner of Exception ; namely, That Religion is the best and truest Wisdom. Give me leave to make but a little Improvement of what has been said, in order to bring the Matter more home to our selves ; and then I shall conclude.

If then Religion be (as I have shewn) the best and truest Wisdom ; It must necessarily follow, by the rule of contraries, that VVickedness and Irreligion is, undoubtedly, the greatest Folly. I will indeed allow, that an ungodly Man may be what we call a VVitty or Ingenious Man, polite in his Behaviour, pleasant in his Humour, and Entertaining in his Conversation : Nay, beyond this, he may also be a Learned Man ; much versed in Books, Skilful in Arts and Sciences, and very knowing in the business of the World : But yet still, if he be a VVicked Man, the above mentioned Consequence must always hold good, and shew that he is very far from being a VVise Man. For if he dares to say but in his Heart that there is no God ; he justly deserves the Character of a Fool, which the Psalmist gives him, *Psal. 14. 1. The fool hath said in his heart there is no God.* But, if he owns the Being of a God, and yet takes



takes no care to obey and serve him, he goes even beyond the Imputation of *Folly*, and is Justly to be look'd upon as a *willful and obstinate Mad-man*.

Give me leave to Illustrate this matter by a plain and Familiar Comparison: Which, Altho' perhaps it may seem a little too mean, yet I think will very well serve to set the Case in a Clear Light. Let us suppose a Man to be Jocular and Witty in his Conversation, able to tell his Story pleasantly and with advantage, and to Entertain his Company with many Jests and diverting Fancies; But yet altogether Careless and Negligent of the common Necessaries of Life; Would any One Judge this Man to be a *Wise Man*? No certainly! For all his Joakes and Repartees; For all his seeming Ingenuity and Pleasantry; The truest Character, and the best that could be given of him, would only be, that he is a *Witty Fool*. For he is not sure of his next Meals Meat, and knows not how soon he may be Exposed to Beggary and Starving, and yet takes no manner of Care to prevent this Evil, and to put himself into some way of Living. Now apply this to the matter in Hand. A Wicked Man knows not but he may Die to Morrow, and is assured that without a true and hearty Repentance he shall be for ever Miserable in the Life to come; Yet all this makes no just Impression upon him, nor puts him upon any effectual course to avoid *the greatest of Evils*, which, For ought that he knows, is ready immediately to fall upon him. Let all Men then, In like manner, Judge whether such a Man can ever justly be look'd on as a *Wise Man*, whatever other Qualifications he may have.

To Conclude all then, If neither the Love of God and the hope of an Eternal Reward, on the One hand, nor the fear of God and Eternal Punishment on the other, will prevail upon us Heartily to Embrace Religion, and live up to its Rules and Precepts; Let the *Shame* at least of being justly

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accounted *Fools*, have some Effect and Influence upon us. Every Man desires to avoid the Imputation of *Folly* as much as he can ; And the Judgment of serious and thinking Men is always of greatest Value and most to be Regarded : That we may not therefore fall under the meanest and most contemptible Opinion of such Men, in whose sight we desire to appear most fair, Let us make it our earnest Prayer to God, and thereunto add our most hearty Endeavours, that we may take all these things so Effectually into our Consideration, and particularly that we may so *number our days : as to apply our hearts* throughly to Religion, which, I hope, I have shewn to be the best and truest *Wisdom*.



## F I N I S



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